Question: How should I condition my older horse so that he’s fit enough to attend trail rides and clinics this summer? He is 18 years old and has only been lightly ridden once a week during the winter.

For the answer to this question, we sought the advice of the American Association of Equine Practitioners.

Answer: Older horses can be conditioned as well as younger horses. They just take more time. A complete physical exam is a good place to start to be sure there are no underlying problems. I would start by riding your horse twice a week for a few weeks then progress to riding four times a week if he is responding well.

It usually takes two rides a week to maintain condition and four rides per week to increase condition.

There are three ways to increase the difficulty of your rides:

1. Increase the time.
2. Increase the speed.
3. Increase the challenge with terrain and footing.

You should only change one parameter at a time after you have increased the frequency of your rides.